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SFA Mast Arboretum News July 2005

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Water, Water, Everywhere!

By Dawn Stover

If you receive this newsletter, it's because you have generously opted to be a contributing member of the Friends of the SFA Mast Arboretum. You will soon receive a reminder asking for this next year's renewal. While the membership fundraisers are earmarked for particular projects, like trails and a new greenhouse, other funds from donations and plant sales help to keep us growing in other ways. Often our changes are subtle, like a new bed here or there, or a new collection of a particular plant genus, new tools, pots, media, fertilizer, and the myriad of other mundane objects that make our day to day jobs possible. Every once in a while though, a project is big enough to stand up on its own and make a noticeable statement.

Anyone who has traveled down East College in between North Street and University Drive within the last year has undoubtedly noticed a bit of a mess at the Jim and Beth Kingham Children's Garden. For the better portion of the last year, I think it's fair to say it's been a big, ugly muddy hole in the ground. However, since mid-April, things have been slowly and steadily transforming into an oasis of sight and sound unparalleled in the arboretum.

Recent SFA horticulture graduate, Nathan Unclebach*, is responsible for the development, and ensuing construction zone at the Children's Garden. Recent work indicates that we can now (almost) count a first-rate water garden among the Arboretum's many themed gardens. Nathan has been interested in water gardening for a while, most

likely a seed planted and cultured by his mother's own interest and experimentation with water gardens as Nathan grew from a wee child into a promising horticulturist.

Where did it all start? A very expensive, very small, 150 gallon, preformed pond was purchased for the Asian American Garden at its inception. An unlucky position downwind of a Sycamore and a trash dumpster prompted a move of the pond to the Native Plant Center. For reasons out of my memory, the very

expensive, very small, preformed pond then came to live under the agriculture building in a dusty unused heap of waste and misery. Enter Nathan Unclebach, king of the unwanted item, savior of the discarded object, guardian of dumpster bound treasures to find our little pond and give it life. The little pond was placed in the greenhouse, leveled, filled with water, and graced with plants and goldfish. Our little ecosystem worked! I think the fish** have since



Nathan Unclebach, SFA Horticulture graduate, has been the driving force behind the new water garden at the Jim and Beth Kingham Children's Garden.

***Fabulous Fall Festival Plant Sale
October 1, 2005***

9 a.m.-2 p.m.

SFA Intramural Fields

Bring your wagon!!

moved to wetter pastures, but the initial success gave Nathan the water garden bug.

The small little pond soon grew into a cattle trough next to the greenhouses. It consisted of eight-hundred gallons of clear, cool water, complete with a biological

filter, even more plants, and feeder fish that bred better

than any rabbit in history. The plants are still hanging around here and there, the fish have moved on (let's call them fertilizer), and the cattle trough, a personal purchase of Nathan, now resides at Naconiche Gardens. Alas, we don't stop here.

The Daylily Garden fountain was in a bit of disrepair. An SFA sculpture class built the original structure, which was quite neat to see. Unfortunately, art courses don't often teach construction tricks like using treated lumber and galvanized metal on projects that will be wet every hour of every day. The eventual demise of the structure left a stagnant, water-filled hole in the ground. Enter Nathan. I'm sure the potential of this giant mosquito pit was more than he could bear.

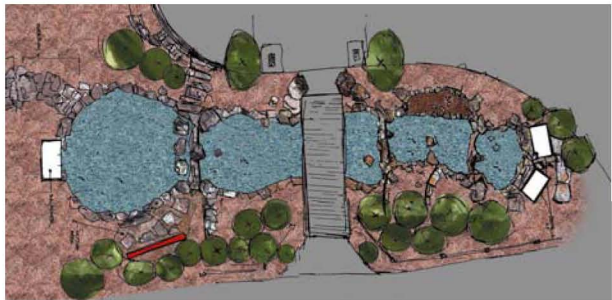
Nine months later, after jackhammers, learning how to mortar stone walls, our first rubber liner, and some fancy pumps and filters, we had a really awesome 2,600 gallon water

feature, AND it's a permanent addition to the arboretum. It's still here, complete with Japanese koi, water lilies, lotus, and the cutest little thing called little floating hearts. The koi have survived, so be sure to meet Sunny, Flash, Felicia, and Mr. Miyagi, and the plants are thriving. Only problem: Nathan had a little over a year left in school. It just wouldn't be right for him to be at SFA with no new water garden construction.

Finally we arrive at the ultimate water gardening experience. I believe that Mr. A.T. Mast at one time



mentioned to Dr. Creech that he would like to see a water feature in the garden. I think Mr. Mast wanted more of a formal fountain, and he wanted it in the Azalea Garden, but lack of electricity and the occasional flood warranted a little thinking on the matter. Meanwhile Nathan had gone through ponds one, two, and three, and finally caught the attention of Dr. Creech. From Mr. Mast's suggestion and Nathan's trials, Dr. Creech formed the idea for the



Design, construction, beautiful water garden...easy as one, two, three?!

Pineywoods Camps Complete Successful Fourth Year

We have just completed our fourth year of environmental education day camps hosted by the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center and SFA Mast Arboretum. This year was extra special because we were able to offer scholarships to campers through the generous support of the SFA Mast Arboretum Volunteers, Nacogdoches Evening Lions Club, SFA Mast Arboretum Board of Advisors, Arboretum Staff, Walmart, and members of Austin Heights Baptist Church. Parents of campers repeatedly expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to send their children to camp. The kids didn't need to say thank you; we saw their appreciation in their smiles and enthusiasm.



At Wonder Woods, four to six year olds learned about the wonders of wildlife in the woods of East Texas using songs, games, art projects, live animals, hiking, and hands-on exploration. Campers learned about snakes, made raccoon masks, went bird-watching, collected insects and tadpoles, and caught the **biggest** fish you can imagine.

Mill Creek campers, seven to eleven years old, learned outdoor skills through a variety of hands-on activities and games. Kerry Barnes shared his knowledge and respect for snakes while Neal Stilley, "The Awesome Fire Dude," got the kids fired up

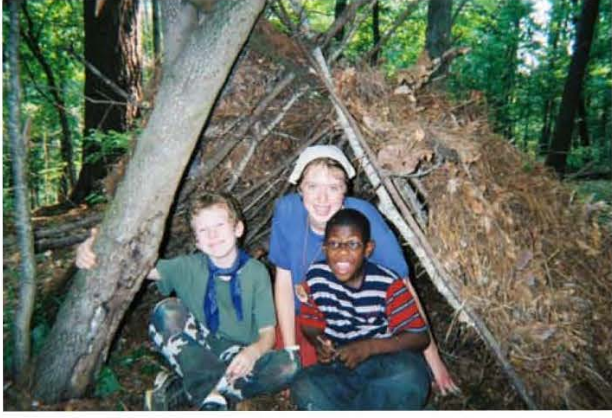
about primitive technology. Several campers actually produced an ember with a fire drill which is a difficult task to accomplish! Campers had plenty of time to hike and explore the woods and streams of East Texas as they expanded their knowledge of plants and wildlife, learned to walk quietly, built debris shelters, and collected water from a tree. A visit to Mill Creek and canoeing on Mill Creek Pond completed a wild and wonderful week at camp.

The success of Wonder Woods and Mill Creek Camp is due to incredible community and volunteer



support. Fifty volunteers gave literally thousands of hours of time and energy to create a quality camp experience for 56 children. Volunteers developed curriculum, acted as counselors, taught fishing and canoeing skills, provided supplies and delicious snacks, shared their expertise, took pictures, sang ridiculous songs, laughed, and appreciated each unique camper.

Camp directors, Kerry Lemon and Elyce Rodewald, are still sorting and storing equipment and supplies from the 2005 camps, but they can't help planning for 2006. Wouldn't it be fun to have an overnight campout...?



water feature at the Children's Garden where a dry stream bed existed. Nathan was approached to formulate a design and budget for course credit. A year and a half later we're almost there; just a few more rocks, some more plants, and a few fish to go. I hope.

Here's what the water garden experience is all about. Three large pools connected by waterfalls constitute this nearly 100 foot long waterway. It holds 17,000 gallons of water that is turned over by three mammoth pumps once an hour. This ensures water clarity, aeration, and filtration. The sides are lined with Oklahoma and Arkansas moss rock, continuing the look of the rest of the Arboretum and Azalea Garden. River stones line the bottom, and gravel can be found in pockets along the sides. A bog near the two bio-falls at the head of the stream serves as a biological filter and a home to bog plants including pitcher plants, spiral rush, arrowhead arum, water orchid, water willow, and papyrus.

Different levels or heights within the pond will allow for different types of aquatic plants. Shallow shelves will contain margin plants that are not only pretty, but help filter nitrates from the water. Some margin plants currently in place include: star rush, sweet flag, dwarf papyrus, and lizard tail. Nathan has chosen not to use canna, iris, or cattails as these tend to get a little messy and require a little more maintenance. However, each of these makes for fantastic margin plants and really helps keep the water clean. After Nathan leaves, I'll probably stick a few iris in here and there – they're blue; I just can't help it.

In the deeper areas of the pools, there are some lotus, and little floating hearts. We will try water lilies, but they like still water, and 17,000 gallons of water turning over every hour over several waterfalls is not "still." Beyond the water, mixed plantings will include perennials, succulents, ornamental grasses, and conifers in silvery shades

of blue and white with a few brighter colors punctuated throughout.

The Arboretum Volunteers generously donated a bronze statue/fountain that helps tie the waterway with the Children's Garden. Three youngsters sit on a log, with a fishing pole in the water. You can get a pretty close view of the statue from the new bridge connecting East College and the Children's Pavilion. The bridge is nice heavy construction

combining wood, copper, and stone to make a functional yet beautiful transition from street to garden. We will add goldfish for now since they are much cheaper than koi, and hopefully karma of fish gone by won't hurt us too much.

There's good news and bad news at this point. Some great things are happening. Toads, turtles, and dragonflies found their way to the water within a week of filling up the ponds.

We have no mosquitoes due to the hungry nature of our wonderful dragonfly larvae! I have yet to see a snake, although I know they're coming. For now I'll count my blessings, and for later

I'll keep Elyce, the snake wrangler, on speed dial. And for the bad news: some greedy, ethically challenged individual felt they needed two of our very expensive pumps for their own purposes. We are in the process of replacing them, but sure wish we didn't have to. And the final bit of bad news – the pond is still incomplete. Nathan promises to have it done by the end of the century, but I'm not holding my breath. All kidding aside, he's really close to completion, and maybe by the time this reaches you in the mail, we'll be ready to schedule a dedication!

Ultimately this new area has great potential and purpose. Water gardening is a hugely popular facet of horticulture these days. All of our horticulture students will be well versed in the construction and upkeep of this particular venue. For our pre-college kiddos, Elyce will be able to implement curriculum from *Project Wet* and *Project Wild: Aquatic* whose



The "Tuesday" volunteers, Peg and Joe Kern, Sherrie Randall, Jimmy Rodriguez, and Gerry and Ramona Peacock enjoy seeing the bronze statue in its permanent location at the new water garden.

activities correlate with state mandated TEKS curriculum and TAKS objectives. And finally, our many visitors can relax and enjoy the soothing sounds of trickling water after a venture through the Arboretum. Please consider yourself invited to visit our newest addition to the garden.

**Nathan would like to personally thank Trey Anderson, Jenny Wegley, Lance Craig, and Brenda Cole for an extraordinary amount of time and effort contributed to the creation of the water garden. Also, a profound thanks to the Arboretum Volunteers for the donation of the wonderful statue.*

*** No fish were intentionally killed at any time. The expensive preformed liner sprung a leak and now sits under the Ag Building in a dusty unused heap of waste and misery.*

Education Assistant Hired

The staff at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center and SFA Mast Arboretum welcomes Amanda Camp as our new Education Assistant. Ms. Camp is a



graduate student in Environmental Science at SFA and brings with her a wealth of experience in environmental education and interpretation. Most recently Camp was a research technician at the Texas Tech Biological Field Research Station

in Junction and an instructor at the Outdoor School at Texas Tech University Center in Junction. Camp is a certified facilitator for Project Wild and Project Aquatic Wild, a Texas Master Naturalist, Board Member for the Texas Riparian Association and volunteer water quality monitor for LCRA. The education assistant position is funded through a grant from the Meadows Foundation.

Big Azalea Donation Arrives from Alabama

By Barbara Stump

June 14th was a big day for the Arboretum and the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. Big in so many ways. First, the donation was big: 3,315 deciduous azaleas, including many hybrid cultivars developed by Dr. Eugene Aromi. A modest estimate of the value is between \$15,000 and \$23,000 worth of azaleas. Second, the nursery that donated them to us is big—Plant Development Services, Inc. from Loxley, Alabama, which researches and grows new plants for Flowerwood Nursery. Third, PDSI manager Jim Berry is a big friend of ours and Dr. Creech's for thinking of the donation idea. Fourth, the truck that brought them to us was big: 52 feet of trailer, 68 feet with the tractor. The truck was so big and had such a colorful banner for Encore azaleas on it that the Daily Sentinel Andy Brosig stopped by for some pictures and we were in the paper on June 15. Finally, we had, and needed, BIG HELP from lots of people to unload the truck, which was filled to bursting with 2-gallon azaleas. All the Arboretum staff helped, some people from SFA Grounds, and nearly a dozen Arboretum Volunteers all pitched in during a long, hot morning to separate and place the azaleas along an irrigation line that Lance Craig and Grounds put in just for this donation. THANK YOU all, dear friends of the gardens.

What are we going to do with all this wealth of plants? Mark Holl from SFA Grounds has asked if he can plant some around the SFA campus. Yes, of course. We will be selling as many as possible at the next Arboretum plant sales—fall is the best time to plant azaleas, so look for a big push in the media and at the October 1, 2005 sale. Finally, we do not have enough Aromi hybrid deciduous azaleas in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, so we will be planting as many as we can in the garden. It is wonderful to now have a large stock of 'Aromi Sunstruck' (pale yellow buds, lemon yellow flowers with deep yellow blotch), 'Goldstrike' (deep yellow with orange blotch), and 'Heads Up' (light yellow with a faint red flush and golden blotch, with red on the outsides of the tubular flowers). We sure would like to see these beautiful deciduous azaleas planted all over Nacogdoches in the backs of borders and in the wooded parts of your yards so they can add another dimension to the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail.